

Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
June 13, 2001
President Bush's National Energy Policy

Today, we begin our examination of the President's energy policy with testimony from the Department of Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham.

As a Californian, I am outraged over this plan and the Administration's stubborn resolve to ignore the concerns of Western families. While the Administration fiddles with an industry wish list of regulatory changes, the very real needs of California go unmet.

First, the President has refused to do anything meaningful to address the incredible price gouging that we are seeing in California and the West. Wholesale electricity prices have skyrocketed and the Administration's political supporters have benefitted enormously. But due to federal inaction, Western families are going to be left footing the bill and regional economies may be sacrificed in the process.

And just yesterday, President Bush denied California's request for a waiver from the Clean Air Act's oxygenate standard. This is a mind-boggling decision. It benefits ethanol producers who support the President politically, but for California it means more air pollution, more expensive gas, and more polluted drinking water.

The President seems to act as though California is a foreign nation. The guiding theme of the Administration's energy policies seems to be to maximize market advantages for the President's political supporters and the states that voted for him.

I also have deep concerns over what the President's policy would do to the environment throughout the nation. Rather than proposing to meet our energy needs while protecting the environment, the President appears to endorse an industry wish list of weakening changes to our environmental laws, such as opening the Arctic Refuge to oil drilling. And his approach to other aspects of energy policy is no more comforting.

The President's policy takes a lop-sided approach that heavily favors supply over efficiency, and emphasizes 19th century energy sources over those of the 21st century. This approach promises an economy that is extremely vulnerable to price and supply volatility. And by redoubling our nation's commitment to oil over the development of renewable energy, the President would abandon the possibility of energy independence.

The President could have proposed a truly visionary long-term energy policy. In the 21st century, we will have to move away from dependence on fossil fuels. In the words of ARCO's Chief Executive Officer, "We've embarked on the beginning of the last days of the age of oil." The first country that realizes this will not only reap the environmental benefits of doing so, but will be positioned to be an economic leader in new technologies.

The President misses this opportunity and instead turns us back to the past.

I am pleased that the Administration is giving a priority to national energy policy. But clearly its blueprint is fundamentally flawed. I look forward to working with my colleagues to craft a workable and forward-looking energy policy that protects consumers, grows the economy, and protects our environment.